

VZCZCXRO9672
OO RUEHPA
DE RUEHUJA #0105/01 0271845
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 271845Z JAN 10
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0079
INFO ECOWAS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMFSS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS IMMEDIATE 0068
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA IMMEDIATE 0029

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ABUJA 000105

SIPDIS
STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, INR/AA
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PASS TO AMEMBASSY MALABO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/01/27

TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR PTER SOCI NI

SUBJECT: KANO GOVERNOR INSISTS HIS STATE HAS NO LINKS TO OUTSIDE EXTREMISTS

CLASSIFIED BY: James P. McAnulty, Political Counselor, U.S. Embassy Abuja, Political Section; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Kano Governor Ibrahim Shekarau insisted to the Ambassador during a January 21 meeting in Kano that the state had no "linkages" to external terrorism or religious extremist groups. He noted that the brigade based in Kano had deployed some of its personnel to Jos in Plateau State to help control communal violence there. He denied that his government had harassed the Kano-based independent Freedom Radio station, but expressed concern over transmission of what he described as "immoral" and profane content during live broadcasts, noting that he has no interest in shutting them down, but as an independent entity they would need to find their own funding. Shekarau indicated that he had not ruled out casting his name as a candidate for the 2011 election and underscored his strong involvement in the "mega party" efforts along with former 2007 presidential candidates, Mohammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar. He expressed support for Vice President Goodluck Jonathan serving as Acting President during Yar'Adua's absence, noting that such action represented "common sense." Separately Emir Ado Bayero noted widespread Muslim concern over perceived U.S. classification of Nigeria as a "terrorist" country, which the Ambassador immediately corrected. She explained the "country of interest" designation and the need for Nigeria to realize that it is not immune to outside threats. END SUMMARY.

NO EXTERNAL TERRORISM TIES IN KANO

¶2. (C) Kano Governor Shekarau agreed that working together and sharing information was the best way to move past difficulties in U.S.-Nigerian relations as a result of the "act of one disaffected young Nigerian," during a January 21 meeting with the Ambassador and PolMilOff (note taker) in Kano. Shekarau denied the existence of any Kano-based "linkages" to Yemen or religious extremist groups. He remarked that the state government had conducted a thorough investigation and found no evidence of such ties in Kano

and regularly monitored speeches and remarks in the mosque to deter any inflammatory comments that would increase tensions. He noted that the government monitored Islamic schools via a Private School Directorate within the state Education Ministry, which approved curriculum, conducted regular inspections, and offered workshops to headmasters and teachers on religious tolerance. He denied the existence of any tension between Shiite and Sunni communities in the state.

GOVERNOR DOWNPLAYS RISK OF VIOLENCE SPREADING TO KANO

¶13. (C) Shekarau confirmed that communal violence in Jos had not spread to Kano, remarking that "we are committed to peace and have not had any incident since 2004." As a precautionary measure, he said he placed all security forces on alert and ordered military trucks to drive around the city in a "show of force" to deter unrest. The Governor noted that the Kano Military Brigade Commander had informed him January 20 that the National Defense Headquarters Division Commander based in Kaduna had ordered the brigade to send reinforcements to Jos, which he did. The Governor said he called an emergency meeting of Kano's "Shoah Council" -- a forum of 50 Islamic scholars, imams, elders, and Muslim business and political leaders -- which directed all mosques in Kano to

ABUJA 00000105 002 OF 004

avoid using provocative language during Friday prayers, in favor of messages calling for peace and respect for the community, regardless of faith. Shekarau insisted that the Shoah Council recruited only "responsible imams," to avoid spreading the "wrong message" to Kano's Islamic community.

NO HARASSMENT OF FREEDOM RADIO

¶14. (C) The Ambassador expressed concern over reports that state government had harassed the independent Kano-based Freedom Radio station. Shekarau denied the allegation, remarking that harassment would not be possible, because state governments exercised no control or influence over federal licensing agreements. He acknowledged, however, that he had communicated "concerns" over recent "immoral content that bothered him." Freedom Radio, he charged, permitted the transmission of "offensive" and profane language during live broadcasts. Government officials, he insisted, had merely "advised them" that transmission of immoral content was inappropriate and the government would no longer place advertisements with the station. He added that he had written to Freedom Radio and the National Broadcasting Agency several times during the last year to note concern about what he called "the immoral content of some broadcasts." Shekarau said that the State Government, after detecting no change, decided not to place advertisements with the station. In response to the Ambassador's question as to whether the state government was trying to shut the station down, the Governor said no, but that he did not feel like government funds should be used to support something immoral. He added that Freedom Radio, as an independent entity, is free to get their funding from whoever but the state would not place advertisements with it.

15. (C) When asked whether he planned to run for the presidency in 2011, Shekarau chuckled and said his party (the All Nigeria People's Party -- ANPP) would need to decide, but that he would not rule out being a candidate. He confirmed his participation in the umbrella, opposition activist group called the "mega party," and said alliances were still being developed to identify a consensus leader. (N.B.: The "mega party" will reportedly transform into an official political party about January 30). Shekarau emphasized that he would not switch parties from ANPP to the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), as other Nigerian Governors have done previously. Shekarau characterized such shifting of platforms after election as "morally wrong," noting that if you want to switch parties you should resign your position as a responsibility to voters.

VICE PRESIDENT SHOULD BE IN CHARGE

16. (C) Shekarau lamented that Yar'Adua's prolonged absence had dragged the country "to the point of uncertainty and confusion," adding that Nigeria's current political crisis could have all been avoided if the Constitution had been respected. He underscored that requiring a special letter from Yar'Adua to confer authorities

ABUJA 00000105 003 OF 004

on the Vice President would be silly. He supported Vice President Jonathan, observing that his service as acting President only represented "common sense." Shekarau noted that he relied on his deputy to sign letters and give orders during his absences from Kano. Yar'Adua should expect Jonathan to do this in his absence as a matter of course. He characterized the actions of the ruling PDP and its failures to effect promised reform as "embarrassing."

EMIR EXPRESSES DISMAY OVER COUNTRY'S TSA LISTING

17. (C) Kano Emir Bayero praised the strong bilateral relationship and shared values between the U.S. and Nigeria, during a separate January 21 meeting with the Ambassador and PolMilOff in Kano. He lamented, however, what he called the recent action of the U.S. to classify Nigeria as a "terrorist country." Insisting that Islam did not support terrorism and that the actions of one Nigerian should not taint the image of all, he expressed hope that the Ambassador would do "all within her power" to remove Nigeria from the U.S. list of "countries of interest." The Ambassador clarified that the U.S. had not labeled Nigeria as a "terrorist" state, but Nigeria was listed as a "country of interest," and that the two countries needed to work together to address some challenges connected to this listing. She explained that the incident of December 25, 2009, should not be reduced by Nigeria as only an issue of a disgruntled citizen, which she hears a lot, but that there is the broader issue of working together to acknowledge that terrorism threats and outside links with extremists exist here. No country, she noted, is immune to this; neither is Nigeria. The Ambassador emphasized that the U.S. is a partner with Nigeria and

willing to work together on these issues and aviation security.

BIOGRAPHIC NOTES

¶8. (C) Kano Governor Shekarau is one of the northern power brokers. He is smart and has proven himself to be an able politician wielding a fair amount of influence not only on northern politics but within the Governor's Forum. He did not originally gain acceptance as a favored son in the PDP and has worked hard to make a name for himself in the opposition ANPP. Shekarau is also known and criticized for his crafty methods of squashing any dissent within his government; he rules the state with an iron hand. He is also reportedly hand-picking his successor (since he cannot run again for Governor), and is accused of using unscrupulous tactics, including using state resources, to ensure that his choice for Kano Governor wins in 2011. Kano is the largest state in the North and reportedly the most populous state in Nigeria, although Lagos still contests this distinction from the 2006 Census. END NOTE.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) The Kano Governor's willingness to share that he would not rule out a run in 2011 as a candidate for president is new news. He had not been seen as a national figure in the past, but, with all the disarray in the North on leadership issues, we could see his name a lot more. Kano is considered the true North in many respects, and one of the centers of Islamic thought in the country.

ABUJA 00000105 004 OF 004

Other Governors, such as Bukola Saraki of Kwara, Isa Yuguda of Bauchi, and Sule Lamido of Jigawa, have not shied away from letting others know of their interest in the presidency. Shekarau until now has not publicly indicated this interest. Clearly, he indicated that the "mega party" -- if it truly transforms into a political party -- is where his political aspiration for the presidency might be nurtured. The current "mega party" umbrella group, however, has several political heavyweights, including former presidential candidates Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar. Therefore, arriving at a consensus candidate, in a group that has no less than three major aspirants for the highest seat in the land, may be difficult. END COMMENT.

SANDERS